NEWS

Former Winchester resident Mike Cassidy writes first legal thriller

NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY | STAFF WRITER

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Former Winchester resident R. Michael Cassidy with his first legal thriller 'When the Past is All Deception,' which was released in mid-September. COURTESY PHOTO/R. MICHAEL CASSIDY

R. Michael Cassidy has checked a lifelong item off his bucket list thriller called "When the Past is All Deception."

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"I always wanted to write a book and it was on my bucket list," Cassidy said. "Well, I'm not getting any younger."

The novel was released Sept. 25 by Atmosphere Press and tells the story of Mark Price, a troubled law professor whose wife, Susan, is murdered in Harvard Square one night on her way home. A partner at a downtown Boston law firm, Susan Price is hiding something. The question is what?

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Winchester residents listen to R. Michael Cassidy give a talk about his legal thriller at Book Ends on Nov. 14. COURTESY PHOTO/R. MICHAEL CASSIDY

The story is inspired by the murder of New England Law Professor Mary Joe Frug in Harvard Square in 1991. The case has never been solv

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"That always troubled me," Cassidy said, of Frug's murder. "That's not a high crime area of Cambridge. Gov. [William] Weld lived around the corner. It was unusual."

Cassidy said what made the case even more unusual were the circumstances surrounding Frug's murder. He said the police ruled out robbery because nothing was taken and there was no sexual assault. The wounds suggested a knife, but Cassidy added there was no evidence Frug tried to defend herself.

Frug's husband, he said, was also never named a suspect.

"These were two high-profile people," Cassidy said. "I just couldn't imagine what was going on in their lives that resulted in this crime."

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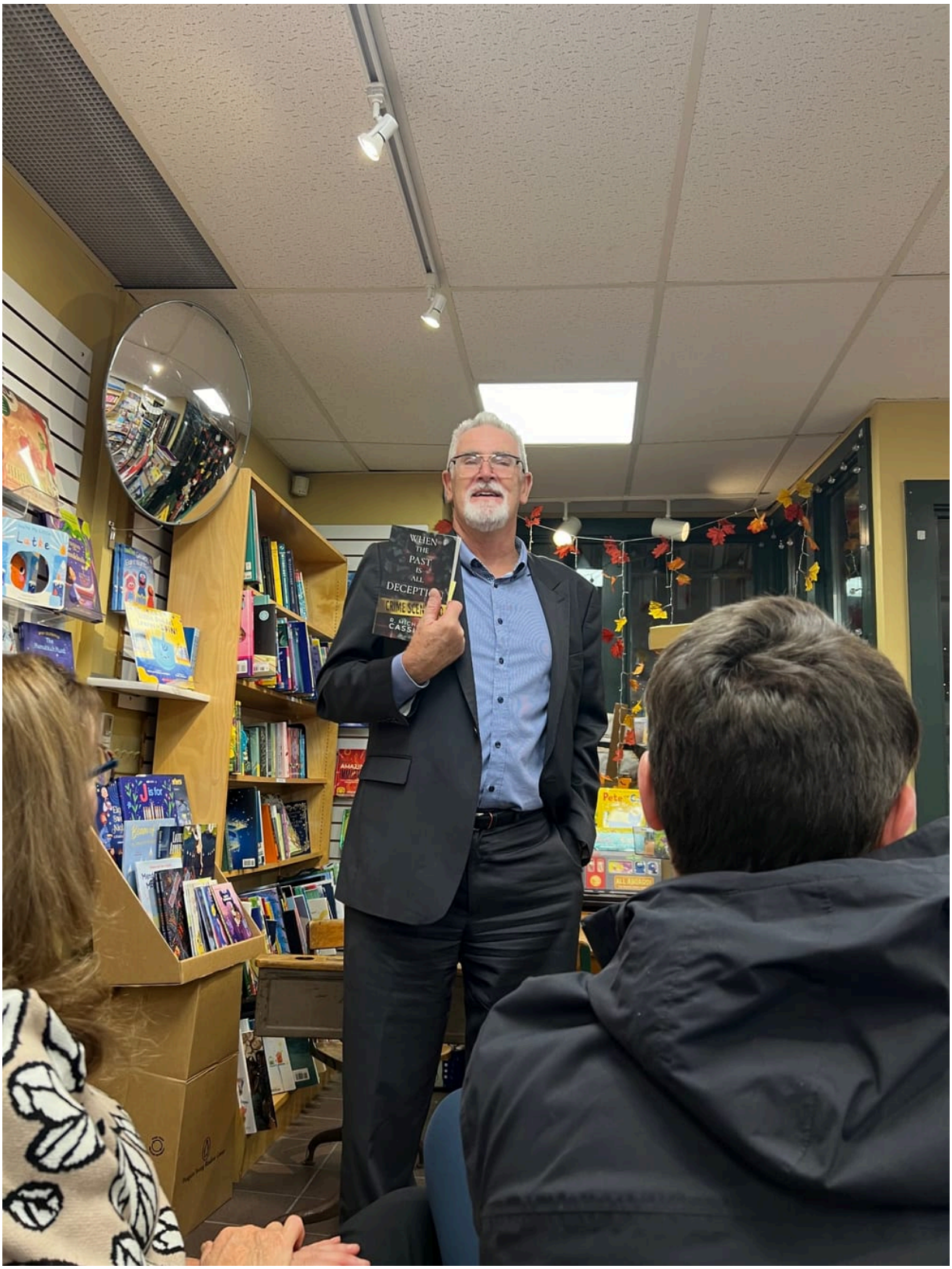

R. Michael Cassidy talks with Winchester residents about 'When the Past is All Deception,' his first legal thriller. COURTESY PHOTO/R. MICHAEL CASSIDY

But the case stuck with him enough that years later, Cassidy decided to base his novel on the crime.

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"I didn't want to write about that case," he explained. "But there was something going on in their lives that led to this attack."

When asked why this particular crime drew his attention, Cassidy said he received some advice after deciding to write his book: Write what you know.

"I know the law and I know what being a university professor is like," he said, adding those two things along with the Frug case seemed like the perfect blend for the book.

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The path to authorship

Winchester residents will most likely remember Cassidy, who, along with his wife, lived and raised their family in the community for 26 years. But shortly before COVID, the couple downsized and moved to Cambridge.

A lawyer for 40 years, Cassidy worked for the Attorney General's Office as a prosecutor as chief of the criminal bureau. He then went on to teach law at Boston College, where he's been for the past 28 years.

With his law background, Cassidy is no stranger to writing. But, he said, it's mostly been technical casebooks or articles about the law.

And yet, he harbored a secret wish.

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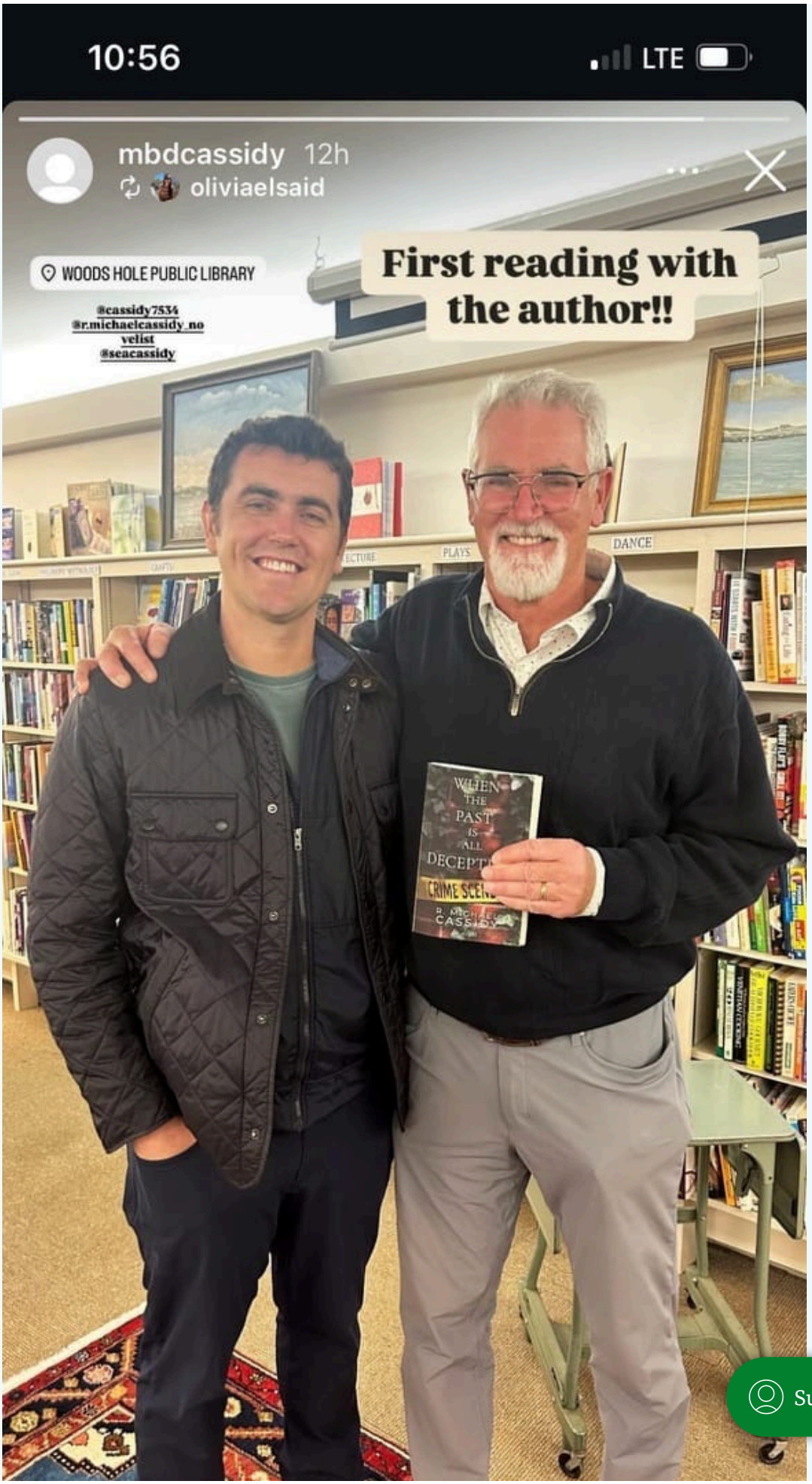
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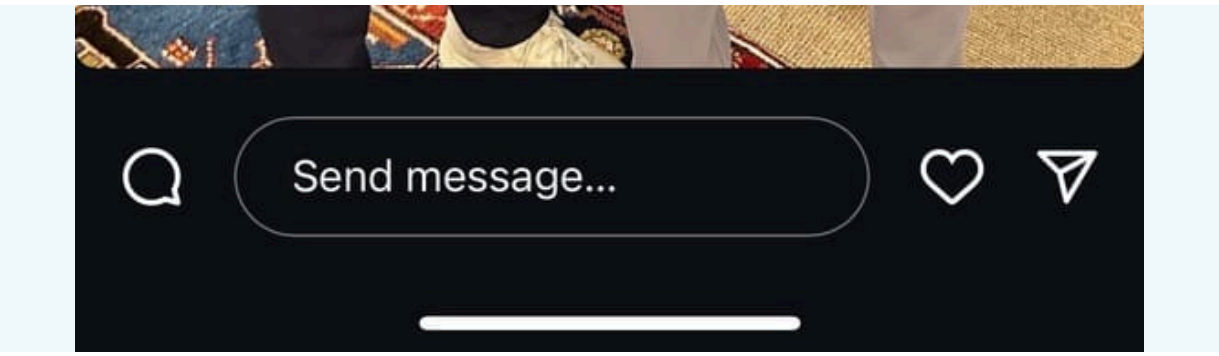

An excited R. Michael Cassidy, right, with son Seamus at the Woods Hole Public Library doing a first reading of his book. COURTESY PHOTO/R. MICHAEL CASSIDY

"I always wanted to write a novel," Cassidy said, with a smile. "I love the legal thriller genre, but there's one thing that annoys me about the legal thriller genre. They never get the law right. I wanted to write a legal thriller that got the law right."

So he set about writing his book, armed with a detailed outline on his characters and details of the crime. As he wrote, he'd go back and modify the outline.
Cassidy said the process took a while.

"It was one of those pick-it-up and put-it-down type of things," he said, of the challenges he faced. "I have a busy day job. I actually spent two summers writing it because in the summers, I don't teach."

Once the book was finished, he hooked up with Atmosphere Press, a hybrid company that helps authors put their work together.

Loving the book

So far, the reactions to the novel have been positive. Cassidy said he's been contacted by friends and family and even strangers who have all loved the thriller.

"People say they couldn't put it down," he said. "That's gratifying heard people say they picked it up on a Friday and spent the weekend

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reading it through. Some people say it's a real page turner. It's most gratifying that people would set everything down to read it."

But he said he's had to remind readers, especially those who know him, that the character of Mark Price is not based on him in any way.

"It's easy to draw parallels, but that person is not me," Cassidy said. "He behaves in some despicable ways. In this book, everyone is flawed. I wanted to write a book about seriously flawed people who get their comeuppance."

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Former Winchester resident R. Michael Cassidy was in Winchester in mid-November to give a talk about his new legal thriller, 'When the Past is All Deception.' COURTESY PHOTO/R. MICHAEL CASSIDY

Cassidy has been making the rounds of local bookstores and libraries, giving a standing-room only talk at Book Ends on Nov. 14. He's al[illegible] talks at the Falmouth and Woods Hole libraries.

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Because Cassidy is in the middle of correcting student papers, he said he hasn't had time to do more talks, although he might be in Lexington or Cambridge after the new year.

"This book is set in Boston and it has a true Boston flavor," Cassidy said. "I would like to do something in the Boston area."

But being back in Winchester to speak at Book Ends, he added, was a real treat.

"It's nice to have a bookstore like that in the community," Cassidy said.

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Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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